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**Christoph Lorey and John L. Plews, eds. *Queering the Canon: Defying Sights in German Literature and Culture*. Columbia: Camden House, 1998. 498 pp. ISBN 1-57113-178-7.**

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**T**he title of this collection of essays is somewhat cryptic inasmuch as it is unclear what the phrase “defying sights” means, or, if in fact this coinage actually corresponds to standard English usage. A cursory scan of the contents reveals that the scholarship in this anthology investigates textual and visual artefacts in terms of their queer, that is, heterocentrist-defying characteristics which have heretofore remained unelucidated.

In the editors’ introduction to the anthology, “queer” is defined broadly as an expression of identity that is at variance with and marginalized by a dominant sociocultural ideology; more specifically, “queer” are those elements of deviance contained within cultural artefacts that resist the heterocentrisim shaping their contours. Lorey and Plews draw on a Hegelian epistemological model to account for the dynamic and trajectory of the queering process. If one speaks with Hegel, one is claiming that empathetic identification with more

integral perspectives, previously considered inadmissible, results in simultaneous self-contradiction and self-transcendence in the direction of an ever-broader horizon of knowledge and truth. However, "queerness is not assimilated, rather it questions the validity of, corrects, partly erases, and partly rewrites the very norm it is called upon to assert: it is deviance that civilises the norm (xix)." This philosophical, teleological frame of reference will no doubt be a target for those critics who demand that homage be paid to Derrida, Foucault, and Freud, since it posits that there are such things as truth, meaning and spirit. Certainly, in terms of current scholarship, a more usual underpinning for the concept of a liminal, queer space between norm-erasure and retranscription would have been, for example, Foucault's model of power that always produces uncontainable resistance, or Barthes's and Kristeva's concept of the *texte de jouissance*. Nevertheless, it would have been more reassuring if this contradistinction and departure from significant trends in current thought and scholarship had been addressed, especially since a significant number of essays in the anthology draw on Foucault for their scheme of reference. Yet overall, the editors' remarks provide an apt orientation and are an enticement to continue reading.

Among the articles that are a pleasure to read is Holger Pausch's essay entitled "Queer theory: History, Status, Trends." Pausch provides an informative and concise overview of the parameters of the debate, making it clear that queer theory's methodologies and objects of investigation are plural and fundamentally political, since the broad objective is to "break down the barriers of racism, sexism, and homophobia" (3). Also of an instructive nature is Angela Taeger's article "Homosexual Love between 'Degeneration of Human Material' and 'Love of Mankind: Demographical Perspectives in Nineteenth-Century Germany," in which she discusses Paragraph 175, a German law criminalizing homosexuality that was in effect as late as 1969. Taeger presents compelling evidence to show how the prevailing views on 'healthy' sexuality have been a function of population maintenance, expansion and control in the context of consolidating the power of the capitalist nation state. Yet by the beginning of the twentieth century, the stigmatization of homosexuality had already begun to be destabilized in sociological and psychological discourse. Evelyn Annuss's article on the "Butler Boom" offers an interesting critique of Judith Butler's Lacanian

deconstruction of gendered duality and of her project to underscore the potential of postmodern decentering and fragmentation of identity as a means to achieve "more pluralistic and heterogeneous forms of politics" (79). Anuss takes issue with Butler's failure to recognize to what extent her own argumentation is embedded in the "cultural logic of late capitalism" (79).

The group of articles under the rubric "Queering German Literature" begins with a well-written piece by Helmut Brall, who employs a Foucauldian approach to examine how attitudes toward homosexuality in medieval chronicles had increasingly less to do with notions of moral reprobation and religious doctrine than with the enforcement of courtly rules of social standing and hierarchy. Equally well-written and compelling is Martin Blum's article on the Middle High German comic tale *The Belt* by Dietrich von der Glezze. Blum demonstrates how this text, in that it employs the same discursive strategies to describe both the erotic norm and its transgression, undermines the prohibition it claims to uphold.

Silke Falkner has written one of the more thought-provoking essays in this anthology with her analysis of the character of Mephisto in Goethe's *Faust II*. Falkner posits that Mephisto undergoes a transformation from masculine assertion to feminine receptivity, from heterosexual desire that maintains the devil's immutable identity to a wish for the desiring gaze of a masculine angel and thus the salvific reciprocity inherent in the impulse to be in union with the other. Another highlight is Robert Tobin's essay "Thomas Mann's Queer Schiller," in which he shows Schiller's astonishing openness to sensual male-male love (166). Although Schiller casts the latter as an imperfect surrogate for male-female bonding, Tobin argues that surrogate and original are portrayed in terms that are indistinguishable in the drama *Don Carlos*. He goes on to demonstrate how Thomas Mann appropriates the queerness of this text for his novella *Tonio Kröger*. Harry Oosterhuis's outstanding article on politics and homoeroticism in the works of Klaus and Thomas Mann traces the evolving attitudes both of father and of son toward homosexuality; Oosterhuis is able to show how these attitudes are predicated on the connection between aesthetics and the perceived role of the artist on the one hand, and the cultural and political crisis of National Socialism on the other.

The last section of the anthology, "Queering German Culture,"



contains pieces on cinema and in one instance works on canvas. Les Wright's discussion of German gay coming-out film in the context of New German Cinema traces the development of this genre from "the primitive [von Praunheim], the classical [Fassbinder], the revisionist [Ripploh] and the parodic [Wortman]" (321). His line of argument is carefully reflected, clearly presented, and ultimately persuasive. Equally insightful and cogent is James W. Jones's discussion of Ripploh's *Taxi zum Klo*, in which he shows how the technique of "intercutting" is used to undermine the stereotypes associated with gay sexuality. Ute Lischke-McNab sees the beginning of a new acumen in German cinema and cinema attendance with Sönke Wortmann's *Maybe ... Maybe Not*. She ascribes this film's novelty and success to its comedic character, its nostalgic revival of 'swing' music from the Weimar period, and Hollywood marketing strategies that include comic books, T-Shirts, posters, and soundtracks. Although the film exploits sentimentality and nostalgia to ensure a healthy profit margin, Lischke-McNab notes that its portrayal of gender fluidity and "'perversity' as an aesthetic impulse" are a significant example of queer discourse (412).

Space does not permit that more than fleeting reference be made to other substantial contributions to this collection, such as Caryl Flinn's analysis of soundtrack and camp aesthetic in von Praunheim's film *Anita*, or Martin Scherzinger and Neville Hoad's essay on the undoing of the hierarchy of major and minor chords in music (of greater interest to those with some background in music notation and theory). Taken as a whole, *Queering the Canon* contains a good deal of original, creative, and inspiring scholarship.

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**Michael Riordan. *Eating Fire: Family Life, on the Queer Side*. Toronto: Between the Lines, 2001. 302pp. \$22.95 (Cdn) ISBN 1-896357-45-8.**

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Three years ago, when I first picked up a copy of Michael Riordan's *Out Our Way: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Country*, I was on my way out of the publisher's fair at the Learned